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ABSTRACT

To eliminate misunderstandings between the worlds of education and broadcasting, it is necessary to recognize five myths: (1) The major force in educating the young is television itself; (2) the sheer amount of time children spend on television is more important than time spent in school; (3) television and education are the same thing; (4) more money is spent on television than is spent on education; and (5) people are forced to watch television. The fact is that television can be educational but is neither a curriculum nor a school. A number of programs have been instituted by the Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS) network to reach out to educators and assist them in using television to support their activities in the classroom, including the CBS Television Reading program and a "Scholar-In-Residence" program with professors in the humanities. In 1985, over 82,000 college students were enrolled in journalism and mass communication courses, an increase of over 10,000 students in those fields in five years. Because of this rapid expansion, educators should ensure that communications course work be not only popular and abundant, but also profound and excellent. Television and education should be complementary, and to achieve this broadcasters and educators need to work together. (DF)

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TELEVISION AND TEACHERS: EDUCATING EACH OTHER

Remarks by GENE F. JANKOWSKI

President, CBS/Broadcast Group

BEFORE THE BROADCAST EDUCATION ASSOCIATION ANNUAL CONVENTION

Dallas, Texas

Saturday, April 12, 1986

For 30 years the Broadcast Education Association has labored to bridge the gap between the worlds of broadcasting and higher education. I am delighted to be with you today to help celebrate and encourage this most important work. To me, few tasks are more important, because misunderstandings between the worlds of education and broadcasting not only can be deep and troubling, but also can thwart productive alliances between our fields.

These misunderstandings lie at many levels. At one level there is deep confusion about the role of commercial television in the education of school children.

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At other levels, the sources of confusion can be traced to deep biases against television within the academic world. It is here that the medium's central role in popular entertainment and commerce is frequently misunderstood and decried. Yet at the same time, the television industry depends upon higher education to play an absolutely critical role in preparing young people for careers in our field. Here, too, we can encounter conflicting purposes and misunderstandings.

Let me attempt to unravel some of these misunderstandings, first by separating the facts from the myths about television and the schools in the education of young people. These roles have become so confused that television has itself been deemed to be the major force in educating the young. This is a preposterous myth in my view. In fact, one recent book by an NYU professor goes so far as to argue: "Television is not only a curriculum, but constitutes the major educational enterprise now being undertaken in the United States." The professor calls television the "first curriculum," school the second.

This notion is based on the myth that the sheer amount of time children spent on television is more important than time spent in school. The facts are otherwise.

This author argues that a typical child may spend 11,500 hours in school between kindergarten and high school, but spends up to 15,000 hours watching television from ages five to 18. Therefore, he concludes, television is the primary educational enterprise. What an incredible line of thinking!

Stating the figures that way tends to distort the fact that on average children spend over three hours a day watching television, the time increasing somewhat in the junior high school years, and then declining in high school. Of course, we know children spend much more time in school each day than that, but since they don't go to school on Saturday and Sunday, or during the summer, comparisons are misleading.

But let's not argue about the numbers, because comparing school and television based on such numbers is absurd. To do so is worse than comparing apples and oranges. When you compare totally different activities simply on the basis of the time devoted to each, you end up with meaningless numbers, and misleading conclusions. Doing so is much the same as arguing that if men spend more time shaving than in prayer, then it follows that razors are more important than Bibles, whiskers more important than faith.

Still, the myth persists that television and education are the same thing. But the fact is that schooling and television are two entirely different realms of human endeavor and experience. The differences are obvious. School is based on a formal body of knowledge organized sequentially, and is mandated by the state which supports and supervises it.

Unlike television, formal education takes place in institutional settings -- schools and classrooms. Students advance through a formal sequence of courses, a curriculum. As they do, they become qualified for higher education or various professions and pursuits. The process of education is one of the most important undertakings in our society by any measure. Only health outranks education in terms of its share of Gross National Product.

Still, there is the myth that more money is spent on television than is spent on education. The fact is that's nonsense. Total spending on education last year, including elementary and secondary schools and higher education, was $260.2 billion. Total spending on all forms of commercial television last year was close to $20 billion, a fraction of that spent on education.

Then there's the myth that people are forced to watch television. Again the facts lie elsewhere. Unlike schooling, television viewing is not mandated by the state. People make viewing choices freely and independently. There is no compulsion. Television viewing takes place during leisure time, and this activity occupies a very different place in human affairs and meets very different needs.

As a primary source of entertainment, television gives the blessings of pleasure to millions of people. As the primary source of news, television is an extraordinary disseminator of information. In this respect, it undoubtedly contributes much to public knowledge and understanding. Equally important, the medium's most pervasive form, network television, binds the nation through shared experiences -- sharing the triumph of American astronauts landing on the moon; sharing the tragedy of the space shuttle exploding in disaster.

The fact is television can be educational, but it is not curriculum nor a school. That is a myth. Television, by design, is not an instrument of teaching. Yet, based on how it is used, the medium has much to offer in educational value.

Some academics do confuse facts and myths. And there are several answers why some of them are opposed to television. One answer is that the role of television has often been misunderstood by behavioral scientists, who have frequently attacked the medium for causing some sort of social harm. Other educators have attacked television for undermining reading and student achievement. When SAT scores went down a few years ago, television received a great deal of the blame. Now SAT scores have climbed. Young people are watching more television these days, but no one is saying our medium was only an easy scapegoat when SAT scores were low.

It is a source of constant amazement to me that the television set, an inert, immobile appliance, that does not eat, drink, or smoke, buy or sell anything, can't vote, doesn't have a job, can't think, can't turn itself on or off, and is used only at our option, can be seen as the cause of so much of society's ills by so many people involved in education.

Broadcasters have been trying to improve impressions about television and to improve relationships with the academic community.

Those efforts have been to reach out to educators and to assist them wherever possible in using television to support their activities in the classroom.

At CBS, for example, such efforts include the CBS Television Reading Program, now entering its 10th year, and our partnership with the Library of Congress in the "Read More About It" project.

Dr. Daniel Boorstin, the Librarian of Congress, describes the effort as "linking the pleasure, power and excitement" of books and television.

We also recognized a need to reach out to the college campuses to talk about our business, especially where we could help demystify the process of creating television and the roles we play in it.

Central to this effort was the production of a unique documentary film, "Making Television: Inside CBS," which has now been viewed at dozens of colleges and universities, and which all of you, I hope, have had an opportunity to see during the last day or so.

We have also tried to bring college professors into our day-to-day business, so we can begin to understand each other on a more intimate basis.

To that end, CBS has instituted a "Scholar-In-Residence" program with professors in the humanities, and last summer we were pleased to have a professor from Michigan State serve as a BEA faculty intern, where he gained extensive involvement with broadcast promotion and marketing activities.

We also continue our dialogue with professors in the behavioral sciences, many of whom have been persistent and influential critics of television for many years.

While we may disagree with their conclusions, we believe it is extremely important to be aware of their concerns, and share with them our research as well. To that end, last month CBS underwrote and participated in a conference that brought together members of the Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues. The conference provided a forum for psychologists, sociologists and various CBS executives to exchange their views.

With all these wide-ranging activities, we have not only shared our own perspectives and experiences, we have listened and learned. Now, let me mention some educational experiences that have had particular relevance to many of us in the industry.

I believe that broad liberal arts training and studies in mass communications have been extremely important to a lot of us both professionally and personally. Yet when we return to college campuses today, we meet an increasing number of young people who are drawn to broadcasting through their studies, but who often receive a limited understanding of our field in the process.

That situation is underscored by the fragmentation in the field. At some schools, television is studied by broadcast or telecommunications students; at others, it's the journalism school; at others, it's mass communications; at others, it's the business school, or the film school, or the drama or speech departments.

Now this balkanization of media studies is not just untidy, it can narrow and limit the vision of young people entering our field. At CBS, managers are attempting to build on the synergies between print, broadcasting and other electronic media. We do this because economic and technological forces are causing once separate media businesses to converge and merge.

There has been no more significant year in our industry's recent history than 1985, when multi-billion dollar mergers in media business linked print, broadcasting, cable, program production and advertising firms in new and wide-ranging combinations.

Yet, for the most part, college teaching about the media field remains divided along narrow disciplines, with different disciplines claiming different pieces of media turf.

As a result, I fear we are producing journalism graduates who are unprepared to be managers, programmers who have little understanding of news, and business graduates who lack knowledge of the creative process. Worse, we have graduates in all these fields who do not have a broader understanding of the society in which they live, its cultural traditions and its moral values.

As I look out across this room, I recognize that I may be preaching to the converted. I recognize that just about everywhere broadcast educators are teaching their subjects as an integral part of the humanities programs in their colleges and universities. I also realize that courses in mass communications and journalism can relate very meaningfully to other studies in the liberal arts.

For those of us who have made careers in broadcasting, the affinity between studies of telecommunications and the liberal arts is obvious. Station managers are business managers who must grapple with elements of news, public affairs and politics. They also must understand the literary, dramatic and comedic forms that underlie the programming their stations offer.

I am convinced that broadcasting and telecommunications courses can effectively contribute to a broad liberal education, but only when they are taught in a way that is intellectually rigorous. You don't have to be a Renaissance man to be a broadcaster, but it certainly helps.

Communications studies have flourished, as colleges and universities have moved away from rigid course requirements. Increasingly, students are acting as powerful consumers in selecting among liberal arts courses. This student consumerism has led to rapid expansion of journalism and broadcast offerings.

One recent survey reveals that in 1985 there were over 82,000 college students enrolled in mass communications and journalism. That reflects an increase of over 10,000 students in these fields in just five years.

Consequently, those of us who care so much about preparing young people for our field must work together to make sure that in its rapid expansion, communications coursework is not only popular, but profound; and not only abundant, but excellent.

Television and education are two different worlds, but they should not be opposing forces. Television and education should be complementary undertakings, and they will be if both broadcasters and educators work together as they have through BEA.

Business executives cannot and should not attempt to write curricula, but they can speak out on behalf of the humanities before college groups and personnel departments. If we want to assure vocationally minded college students that a liberal arts education will be valuable, then company personnel departments must be as accommodating to history majors as they are to business administration majors in their recruiting.

Let me close by noting the theme of your conference: "A Partnership of Broadcasting and Education." The word "partnership" implies working together. That's the right way to approach the relationship. There is much we can do together. There is much we can give to each other. To do so, we must continue to devote time and energy to the task of educating each other. I strongly believe that we will.

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